

COOPER NAMED ONE OF "10 DEBT DAREDEVILS"

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By Mark McKinnon

With indebtedness and dependency threatening the nation, Mark McKinnon remembers the Alamo—and finds 10 brave souls in Washington, from Paul Ryan to Dick Durbin, who dare to take on the status quo.

Like James Bowie and Davy Crockett, who dared to cross a line in the sand to join Col. William Barret Travis in defense of Texas independence, a brave few in Washington have taken a heroic first step to repel the forces of intransigence.

“In the present confusion of the political authorities of the country, and in the absence of the commander in chief, I beg leave to communicate to you the situation...” Travis wrote during the siege of the Alamo 175 years ago, in a letter that could have been written today. He saw clearly the coming threat and laid out a plan. He did not wait for reinforcements who would not come in time. Travis took action. He led his men of “high-souled courage” in defense of freedom. Although these heroes fell in battle, “Remember the Alamo” became the rallying cry, and the war was won. Texas gained independence because of those who dared to lead.

While the bombardments of demagoguery politicians in Washington face today are not so deadly, the situation is no less dire. Indebtedness and dependency threaten to enslave the nation. But there are a few who have shown high-souled courage by thinking outside the lines to save for future generations the promise that is America. And it’s time to call in reinforcements.

1. Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), on the path to a debt-free nation: “We must not be the Congress that failed to fulfill the American legacy of leaving a better nation to our children... America is a nation conceived in liberty, dedicated to equality, and defined by limitless opportunity. Equal opportunity, upward mobility, prosperity—this is what America is all about. In all the chapters of human history, there has never been anything quite like America.... Colleagues, this is our defining moment.”

2. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) differs with other top Democrats, saying Social Security changes should be made now: “In 2037, as we know it, Social Security falls off a cliff. There’s a 22 percent reduction rate in payments, which is really not something we can tolerate. If we deal with it today, it’s an easier solution than waiting. I think we ought to deal with it. Many of my colleagues disagree, put it off to another day. But from my point of view, leaving it out makes it easier politically; including it, I think, meets an obligation, which we have to senior citizens.”

3. Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK) joined Ben Cardin (D-MD) to introduce a bill to repeal an ethanol tax credit: "At a time when our nation is facing a debt crisis, it is an outrage the Senate won't even allow a vote on my amendment to eliminate the ethanol corporate welfare subsidy and save taxpayers nearly \$5 billion. If Congress can't cut a corporate welfare subsidy the corporations themselves don't want, what can we cut? Ethanol is a case study of how parochialism trumps progress in Congress. Sooner or later, the Senate will take a vote on this issue."

4. Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN) joined Rep. John J. Duncan Jr. (R-TN) to introduce the bipartisan CAP Act to put an across-the-board, binding cap on all federal spending: "Government got too big under Presidents Bush and Obama, and now it needs to go on a diet. The CAP Act will return our government to its normal size. We don't need an oversized government to deliver the services that people need; we need the lean and fit government that this bill would lead us to."

5. David Walker, former comptroller general of the U.S. (1998-2008), and a co-founder of No Labels, commends Ryan's budget plan, but adds: "...defense cuts that do not compromise national security and comprehensive tax reform that raises more revenue also need to be on the table in order to help ensure bipartisan support for any comprehensive fiscal reform proposal. Our current fiscal policy and path is both irresponsible and morally reprehensible. At the same time, the manner in which we address this challenge also raises key moral questions. Our political leaders from both parties need to be at the table with everything on the table in order to achieve sustainable success."

6. Rep. Allyson Schwartz (D-PA) joined Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) as co-sponsor of a bill to repeal the unelected Medicare Independent Payment Advisory Board created by the Obama health-care law: "It's our constitutional duty, as members of Congress, to take responsibility for Medicare and not turn decisions over to a board... I cannot condone the implementation of a flawed policy that will risk beneficiary access to care. We can and will address the unsustainable rate of growth in health-care spending... We cannot impose a financial burden on patients and providers to conceal inherent flaws in our health-care system through arbitrary cuts."

7. Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA) negotiated with backers of two competing proposals, securing the support of all 47 Republican senators for a balanced-budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution: "A balanced budget is an absolutely necessary condition for the strong economic growth and job creation that, frankly, we were sent here to accomplish... [the measure] will provide the fiscal straitjacket that we need to get our fiscal house in order."

8. Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA), urging bipartisan action on debt reduction: "[O]ur national debt is now approaching \$14 trillion. Remarkably, we're still writing checks. That we're still allowed to have a checkbook may be even more remarkable... our nation's fiscal challenges are too serious, and the fiscal hole we've dug for ourselves is too deep, to be solved by looking at only one side of the ledger... it is clear that America cannot be a leader in the world, projecting strength and promoting democracy, if we are weakened at home by our own deficits and debt... ever since this economic downturn began, individual Americans and their families have been required to make tough choices of their own about how to make ends meet. It is time for those of us here in Washington to do the same."

9. Anne Vorce, Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget: "We are at a crossroads. We still have a choice: We can make fiscal changes on our own, wait until the eleventh hour to tackle the series of fiscal challenges we face, or wait until changes are forced upon us by the financial markets. If Americans better understood the choices they face, there would be a richer and more informed national conversation about how—not whether—to put our fiscal

house in order and what compromises are necessary.”

10. Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND), on facing the debt threat: “History is going to judge whether we have the courage, character, and the vision to stand up for America’s future. Those who take a walk, those who turn away, those who don’t have the gumption to stand up, are going to be judged very, very harshly.”

That’s our take. What’s yours? Whom have we missed?

As vice chairman of Hill & Knowlton and Public Strategies, and president of Maverick Media, Mark McKinnon has helped meet strategic challenges for candidates, corporations and causes, including George W. Bush, John McCain, Ann Richards, Charlie Wilson, Lance Armstrong, and Bono. McKinnon is co-founder of No Labels and co-chair of Arts & Labs.